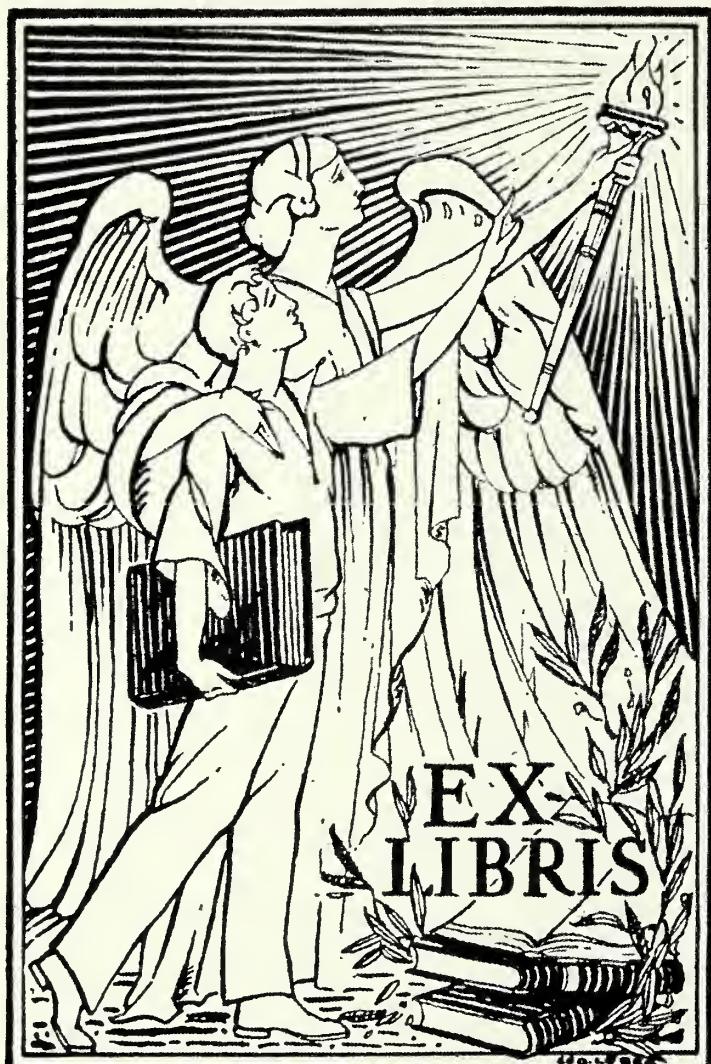


Cyr De Brant

"The Gay Sisters"

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“The Gay Sisters”

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CYR DE BRANT



“The Gay Twins” have won honors and plaudits on the radio and concert stage where their two-piano recitals have been occasions of great expectancy and pleasing musical rewards. They have made concert appearance in the United States and Canada and have been heard on an international coast-to-coast hook-up. In their years as

concert artists they have been heard in several mid-Western states and appeared as guest soloists with the Kansas City Orchestra under Dr. Karl Kruger. In Montreal, Canada they gave an extended series of two-piano recitals which were heard over the combined radio facilities of the Canadian Broadcasting Company and the Mutual Net-

work. Montreal also heard them with the Montreal Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Wilfrid Pelletier.

All this would be a great accomplishment in the life of any artist but in the case of "The Gay Sisters" it is an outstanding achievement for they have for all practical purposes been handicapped by blindness since their early years. They are identical twins born to Prof. W. J. Gay, a church organist, and Mrs. Gay of Faribault, Minnesota on March 12, (the feast of St. Gregory) 1915. Today however, they are known as Sister Jeanne Madeleine and Sister Francis Terese. Oculists have diagnosed their case as congenital cataracts with the iris adhering to the lens, causing pin-point pupils. A series of operations begun when they were six has been of some help, for with the aid of thick lenses they were able to do all the ordinary things except reading from print. This has not only been necessary but was an added precaution to save what little vision they had. Lucille has had eight operations, the last in 1939, and her sister, four, the last of hers being performed in 1933. Now they are able with powerful lenses to move without assistance in familiar surroundings but reading must still be confined to Braille.

From their earliest years their handicap was never a real discouragement but an obstacle that had to be overcome if they were to lead a normal life. They began their musical training when eight at the Nazareth Institute in Montreal, Canada and six years later graduated with high honors receiving the elementary, intermediate and superior certificates of music. Fortunately they were able to continue their studies after graduation with Dr. Francis Richter, a pupil of Leschetinsky, and at eighteen the twins were judged ready for the concert stage. This was no small accomplishment for untold patience and long hours of practice were under the circumstances necessary to achieve the perfect timing and coordination that has been a special character of their musical technic.

In 1942 they both came to the day of great decision and sought entrance into the Franciscan Order at the motherhouse in Milwaukee. After the days of their postu-

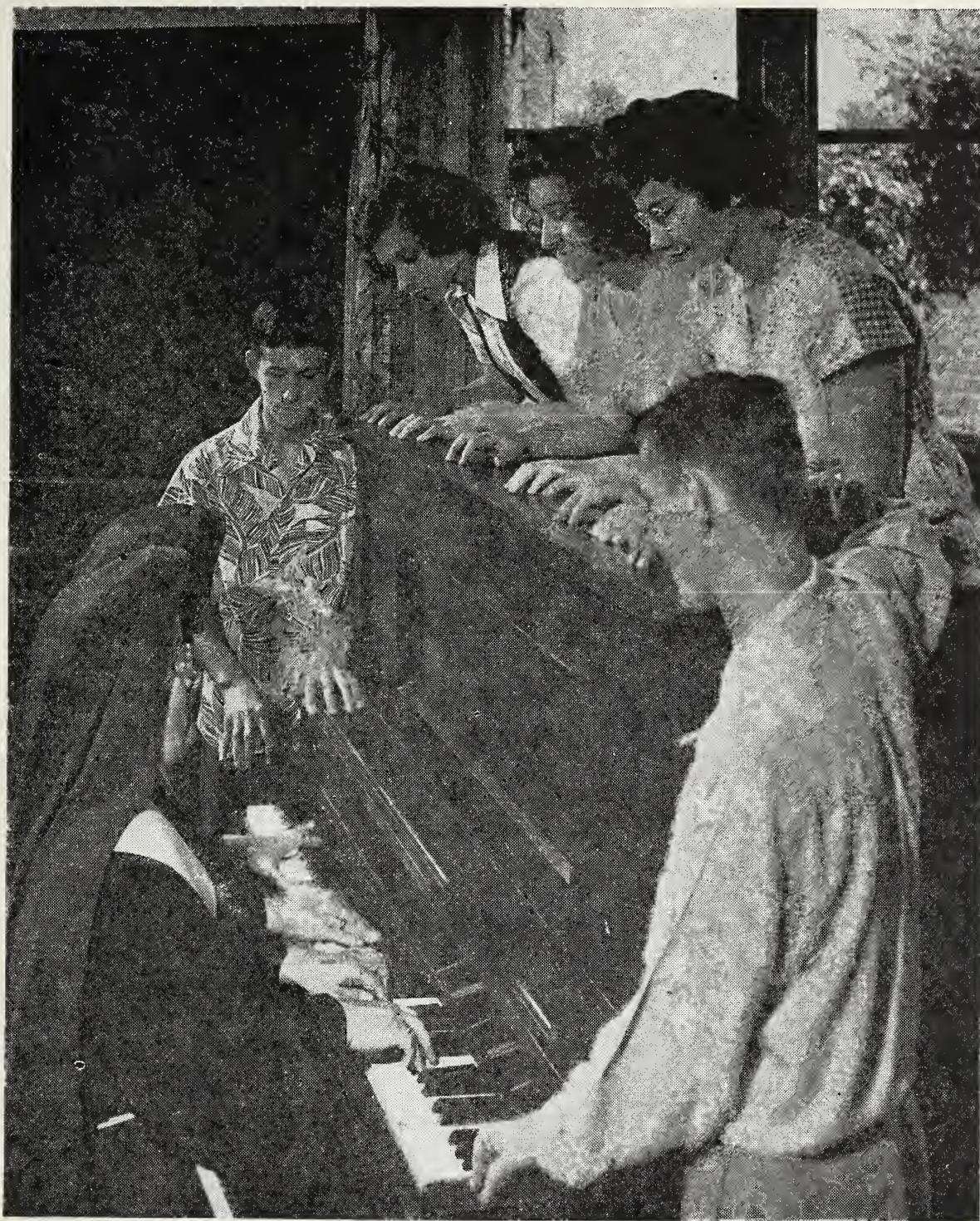
lancy and novitiate they made their profession as Sisters of St. Francis and are known to us today as Sister Jeanne Madeleine and Sister Francis Terese. They continued their musical studies at the Chicago Musical College under Rudolph Ganz and were in time appointed to the musical faculty of Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee.

The course of their music career to this point is amazing but the sequel is just as striking. One day each week is given to aiding the handicapped children at St. John's School for the Deaf. A sense of their own limitations has especially fitted them to cope with the needs of the deaf and the speech-handicapped.

January 12, 1947 is a day that will be long remembered in the history of Milwaukee and the surrounding towns, for the city was caught in one of the severest blizzards in its history. Early that day the two Sisters and another Sister of the community started off for Chicago where they were to take their regular music lesson. The Sisters were accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Gay who were anxious to hear their children play once again. With many others they were caught in the aftermath of the blizzard but were "rescued" by a kindly gentleman.

The hours of hardship that they endured during the overnight stay in the North Shore Station in Milwaukee, since no trains were available, did in the end prove to be a fortunate incident. It was Mr. Joseph H. Conlin, to whom we are indebted for these pictures and information, who took heroic measures to see them safely home. During these trying hours he promised the elderly Mr. Gay, now blind, that he would have some recording made of the Sisters playing so that he might once again enjoy the pleasure which was no longer possible since the twins had entered the Franciscan Order. Greater possibilities were seen, as the promise was fulfilled, and today a series of records, the "Convent Series" an album of eight records, is now available to the public.

The question, how do they accomplish their task, is certainly uppermost in the mind of anyone who hears their performance. It is a long and painstaking process but undauntedly accomplished. A member of the college staff plays the selections for



them and since the two Sisters are endowed with absolute pitch, they take down the music as it is played, each taking her own part on the Braille typewriter. From then on it has to be memorized and integrated again to the perfection they both demand.

No less interesting is their work with the deaf children. Musical vibrations in the training of the deaf dates back some 75 years and has since been expanded. The musical vibrations in this training program aid in improving the listening faculties of the deaf and the articulating abilities of the speech-handicapped. The musical phrases accentuate the sound and the regularity of stress and beat gradually develop sound

perception in their hearing and tone quality in their speech.

Braille as many know, developed his system to aid the musically handicapped, and countless students have been the benefactors of his genius. Of these many debtors we are certain that he would be especially proud of "The Gay Twins" and that they would be accounted as among his foremost pupils. We will never know till another world why the Lord has chosen to deny them the normal use of their eyes. He must however, on the other hand, rejoice that His daughters have given their best and greatest effort in His service.

Inquiries

REV. JOHN C. SELNER, S.S.

Q. I have heard organists in church playing choruses from the "Student Prince" and even "Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral"; also "Moonlight and Roses." Is it that they don't know any better, or don't they care?

A. I really cannot answer that question. The law of the church is clear enough, and the law binds in conscience: secular music is simply not permitted by voice or organ or any other instrument. All I can say is that you can see how destructive private judgment is, even in what may be considered a minor matter; imagine what happens when it hits doctrine and morality! Of course, these organists may reason that because a piece is pretty it has a religious character; how they come to that conclusion is your guess as well as mine; but the fact remains that such music is for the stage and for secular use. All of this was emphasized so strongly by Blessed Pius X in the *Motu Proprio* by which he intended to bind everyone concerned in conscience. It was argued in the Council of Trent whether or not a church musician who was directly responsible for importing secular music into the church would not be guilty of mortal sin. The canons of the Council do not say that in a flat statement, but you can see the spirit in which the law was laid down.

Q. Is it required to sing the Sequences on Feasts such as Easter and Pentecost? And if there should be High Masses on the days of the Octaves of these feasts, must the Sequences be sung entirely on those days?

A. Since the Sequences of Easter and Pentecost, as well as Corpus Christi, Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin (September 15) and the Requiem Mass are part of the proper of the Mass they must be sung entirely (S.R.C. 2959 ad 2; 3365 ad 7; 3624 ad 11). The question of omitting parts of these Sequences has often been raised, but no exception is made. Hence, whenever a Mass with a Sequence is sung, the Sequence

must be sung with it. How this is to be done is up to the choirmaster. The Sequence may be rendered in chant, modern music, or even on a straight tone, but it must be rendered completely.

Q. How are we to judge whether this or that English hymn is suitable for Church use?

A. This would be a good opportunity to write a book; but for the time being, I shall restrain the inordinate tendency! Your question contains a great problem: however, it can be solved. First of all, depend in general upon the norms given in the *Motu Proprio*: the music we use in Church must be holy, artistic and universal; and the closer it comes to the spirit of Gregorian Chant, namely in its savor, inspiration and movement, the better suited it is for the sanctuary.

Still, there are modifications to be considered when it comes to detail. English hymns are connected with what might be called *informal*, non-liturgical worship; not that the music of our hymns should be out of keeping with the spirit of liturgical worship, but their very poetic form and the times they are used, would, it seems to me, admit of what might be called *informal* music—music which is more familiar than chant, polyphony or even the better types of modern music used in our Masses and liturgical functions.

But to keep this little treatise "little," I suggest the following points in judging the merit of English hymns:

1. Do the words make good sense? Are they respectful? Do they avoid stickiness or sentimentality? Little jingles are not fit to be used for hymns. However, magnificent poetry may be objectionable too, because it is not suited to congregational expression—too subjective, personal. Also there is no harm in controlled sentiment, slightly emotional expressions perhaps, pro-

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